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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SC](#) [XL](#)  
SUBJECT: OECS 25TH ANNIVERSARY: PITY PARTY OF NINE

REF: A. BRIDGETOWN 992  
[1](#)B. BRIDGETOWN 797  
[1](#)C. BRIDGETOWN 754  
[1](#)D. BRIDGETOWN 553

Classified By: Ambassador Mary Kramer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Leaders of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) met in St. Kitts June 21-23 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization's founding. The event could have provided an opportunity for participants to extol the advances made since the signing of the Treaty of Basseterre in 1981, but was instead used to lament the region's limitations and reprimand more developed countries for their callousness toward the Eastern Caribbean. The outgoing OECS Chairman, St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, went out of his way to pillory the United States for "arrogant triumphalism," among other perceived failings. A notable absence from the gathering was St. Lucia Prime Minister Kenny Anthony, who was receiving medical care in Cuba. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Ambassador Kramer and Poloff attended events marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the OECS in St. Kitts on June 21, including the opening ceremony, trade fair, donor conference, and gala dinner. Notable among the events was the signing of the Declaration of Intent to Form an Economic Union, a preliminary step in the further economic integration of the OECS, which is expected to become final with the signing of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre on July 1, 2007 (ref D).

[1](#)3. (U) Representatives from the nine OECS member states (independent nations Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and self-governing British overseas territories Anguilla, Montserrat, and the British Virgin Islands) met in St. Kitts June 21-23 for what could have been a forward-looking and celebratory event, but was instead characterized by excessive complaining. With the notable exception of a trade fair that demonstrated the entrepreneurial potential of the Eastern Caribbean, events that should have highlighted the progress made since the 1981 founding of the OECS, such as successful cooperation on a unified monetary system, were marred by numerous references to the poor economic position in which the region finds itself. The blame was laid firmly at the feet of more developed countries and international donors.

Opening Ceremony - Would You Like Whine With That?

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14. (U) In her opening remarks, Dr. Len Ishmael, Director General of the OECS, expressed her belief that Eastern Caribbean political and economic integration should be carried out by the current regional leaders who, because of their similar social and educational backgrounds, share a common Caribbean culture. In contrast, the OECS Director is concerned that the next generation of regional leaders will have been influenced more by a globalized culture, thereby making them less likely to have a deep commitment to regional integration. Ishmael's remarks also reflected an "us vs. them" mentality common within the Eastern Caribbean sub-region when she referred to CARICOM as another regulatory group with which OECS states have bilateral and cooperative relations.

15. (U) Typical of sentiments expressed during the OECS meeting were the remarks of St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Denzil Douglas, who commented that the region was suffering from the "fallout of international incidents" such as the termination of sugar and banana subsidies and preferential trade agreements. The PM said that the next step for the OECS was to sign its new economic union treaty that would forge closer trade ties; for this effort to succeed the region would need the support of its development partners (i.e., more money).

#### Trade Fair

16. (U) The Trade Fair was the only event which showcased the potential of the region to move beyond its historical dependency on agriculture and tourism. Approximately sixty business ventures from various islands were present, ranging from entertainment to textiles, building materials to gourmet foods and beverages, and pottery to skin care products. To participate in the Trade Fair the companies had to have a business plan, proven capacity to meet demand and established quality controls. The diversity of products, professional promotional materials and packaging, and unique design of similar products from different islands showed the entrepreneurial promise of the region.

#### Comrade Ralph on a Roll

17. (U) An audible groan arose from various quarters as the garrulous outgoing OECS Chairman and PM of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalves, announced that he was tossing out his prepared speech because "others had already touched on those topics." Speaking extemporaneously, Gonsalves exhorted participants to remember 1981, when the original Treaty of Basseterre brought the OECS to life, and look at the progress made since then.

18. (U) Gonsalves echoed a refrain commonly heard in the Caribbean when he lambasted the U.S. for displaying "arrogant triumphalism" since the end of the Cold War for having the attitude that small island people are insignificant, do not know what they are doing, and tend to "follow fashion" politically and economically. He also condemned the British for having amnesia with regard to the region, noting that the only reason these small states entered the sugar and banana business was to support the British Empire. Now these staunch supporters of the UK and U.S. have been tossed aside.

19. (U) "Comrade Ralph," as he is affectionately referred to in St. Vincent, proceeded to rail against the developed world and the U.S. in particular for being selfish and arrogant in implementing disaster assistance for hurricane damage. He blamed the same countries who provide meager assistance to counteract the effects of global warming for making climate change so much more devastating to small island states. On a roll, Gonsalves pledged that the OECS would stand for principle against power and blasted the U.S. for increasing criminal behavior in the Caribbean, not by deporting criminals but by exporting "ghetto culture" through music, movies, and television.

## A Rational Voice Is Heard

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¶10. (U) Incoming Chairman of the OECS and Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda Baldwin Spencer was more statesmanlike and conciliatory in his remarks than the other speakers, although he refrained from rebutting even their most outrageous claims. The PM noted that political and economic integration would affect the relationships of OECS member states that were moving from inter-governmental to supranational relations. Spencer attempted to allay the potential concerns of CARICOM counterparts present that OECS economic union might undermine the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), stating that it was still the intention of the Eastern Caribbean to participate fully in Caribbean-wide integration.

Where is PM Anthony?

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¶11. (U) The absence of St. Lucia PM Kenny Anthony was noted, considering the significance of the OECS's twenty-fifth anniversary. The PM was with his wife in Cuba where they both reportedly received medical treatment. The PM, who is due to call an election later this year, attempted to keep his medical treatment a secret until rumors began circulating in St. Lucia and the Government had to release an official statement.

Comment

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¶12. (C) Sadly, the OECS's twenty-fifth anniversary appeared to be a missed opportunity: rather than sharing a positive vision for the future, Eastern Caribbean leaders seemed intent on holding a pity party. Although they represent the smallest states in CARICOM, the OECS group is better integrated than CARICOM as a whole. OECS integration is proceeding, both within the sub-region and with the larger CARICOM group, but sensitivity over sovereignty issues, personality conflicts among leaders, and trade complaints among the island states will likely continue to slow the process.

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